
JOHN

FACE-TO-FACE WITH JESUS

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John: Face-to-Face with Jesus

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How to Use This Study

Your study of John will have maximum impact if you prayerfully read each day's Scripture passage. The entire text of John from the English Standard Version is printed before each lesson's reading, so that everything you need is in one place. While we recommend reading the Scripture passage before you read the devotional, some have found it helpful to use the devotional as preparation for reading the Scripture. If you are unfamiliar with the English Standard Version (on which this series of studies is based), you might consider reading the devotional, followed by reading the passage again from a different Bible text. This will give you an excellent basis for considering the rest of the lesson.

After each devotional there are three sections designed to help you better understand and apply the lesson's Scripture passage.

Consider It—Several questions will help you unpack and reflect on the Scripture passage of the day. These could be used for a small group discussion.

Express It—Suggestions for turning the insights from the lesson into prayer.

Go Deeper—The nature of this study makes it important to see the Book of John in the context of other passages and insights from Scripture. This brief section will allow you to consider some of the implications of the day's passage for the central theme of the study (Face-to-Face with Jesus) as well as the way it fits with the rest of Scripture.

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Lesson
1

Meet the Word

Those who read the Gospels in order can't miss the distinct change in style within the first few verses of John's Gospel. Matthew, Mark and Luke prepare us for John. As we begin this study, get ready for an up close and personal experience with Jesus Christ.

John 1:1–51

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. ⁸He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

Key Verse

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,

glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

The Testimony of John the Baptist

¹⁹And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” ²²So they said to him, “Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

²⁴(Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) ²⁵They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, ²⁷even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” ²⁸These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Behold, the Lamb of God

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John bore witness: “I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’” ³⁴And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

³⁵The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found

the Messiah” (which means Christ). ⁴²He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” ⁴⁹Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Go Deeper

This lesson’s key verse introduces two words that will appear repeatedly in the Gospel of John: *receive* (see John 1:11–12; 3:11, 27; 5:34, 41, 43–44; 7:39; 12:48; 14:17; 20:22) and *believe* (see John 1:7, 12, 50; 3:12, 18; 4:21, 42, 48;

5:38, 44, 46–47; 6:29–30, 36, 64; 8:24, 30, 45–46; 9:35–36, 38; 10:25–26, 37–38; 11:15, 26, 40, 42, 48; 12:36, 39, 44; 13:19; 14:1, 10–11, 29; 16:9, 30–31; 17:20–21; 19:35; 20:25, 31).

(continued)

Go Deeper Continued ...

John uses one term to explain the other. To *receive* Jesus means to “*believe* in his name.” *Receive* means more than opening a package or mail. It can also mean to acknowledge, welcome or honor. In formal settings, when one person accepts a visit from someone, we say they “received” their guest.

Believe means more than mental agreement; it means active trust. From the beginning of this Gospel we are being asked not simply to admit Jesus is God, but to treat Him as God by the way we act, trust and live. This day-by-day decision will become clearer as we make our way through the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John ranks high in the list of favorite Bible books. Many followers of Jesus cite passages in this book as the key words of truth that awakened them spiritually. Others value the life-changing encounters John recorded between Jesus and people like Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery and the man born blind. They see themselves in these conversations and find in them a Savior worth knowing.

And practically every believer in Jesus knows John 3:16. The frequent appearance of that reference at football games probably doesn't do much to tell people about Jesus, but it does provoke a smile of recognition in believers. And occasionally someone may innocently ask, “What's that JOHN 3:16 all about? I see it everywhere.” Now, that's an opportunity to share your faith.

Your study of the Gospel of John will probably take you through familiar territory. But if this is the first time you have studied one of Jesus' biographies on your own, be ready for some surprises. The Jesus you have heard about will meet you in these pages. And whatever you've heard, He will be greater, better and more challenging than you expect.

In this lesson's passage, the apostle gives a resounding “Yes!” answer to a question that was as prevalent in the first century as it is today: Is Jesus really God? This is also John's answer to the question Jesus asked in Matthew 16:15, “But who do you

say that I am?” On that occasion, Peter answered for all the disciples. Years later, John gave the short answer to the same question in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” He offered us the long version of the answer to the question with his entire Gospel.

In a way, John’s approach is similar to the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1. There, Moses did not start with a need to prove God’s existence; he began by declaring that the existence of everything else simply makes God a necessary belief. Likewise, John doesn’t set out to prove Jesus is God; he declares Jesus is God and then proceeds to demonstrate his point. Both Genesis and John remind us that “in the beginning” Someone already was. Someone orchestrated the beginning. God, the Word who has no beginning, started everything else.

People who deny God’s existence reveal one or more insights about themselves. When they use the term “God,” they are already admitting they have an idea about God, but they are choosing to reject it. The real problem isn’t with God but with their distorted view of God. When someone mentions doubts or denial of God’s existence, ask them to describe the God they don’t believe in. Tell them that in all likelihood you don’t believe in that god either. But be ready with an answer if they ask you the same question: “Well, tell me about the God you believe in.” Be ready to talk about Jesus.

People who deny that Jesus is God usually try to mix a little respect with their rejection. They offer compliments with a “but” attached: “Jesus was a great teacher *but* not God,” or “Jesus was one of God’s spokesmen *but* not God.” As has been pointed out in many ways, we can’t avoid Jesus by being nice to Him. He won’t settle for partial commitments.

Jesus was a great teacher, but He said too many things that a great teacher *wouldn’t* say unless He was also God. Jesus spoke, not as God’s spokesman, but as God. He did not expect compliments from men and women; He expected to be received as Lord and as God. This lesson’s key verse makes the choice clear: reject or receive. Those who don’t receive have rejected, even if

“*Jesus spoke, not as God’s spokesman, but as God. He did not expect compliments from men and women; He expected to be received as Lord and as God.*”

they have done so nicely. “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

During this study of the Gospel of John, you will have the opportunity to make this choice about Jesus or confirm the choice you made previously in life. We trust that as you come face-to-face with Jesus, you will understand in a new and deep way what it means to receive Him and believe in His name.

Express It

The phrase “In Jesus’ name” that believers often use to end their prayers comes from the Gospel of John (16:24). When we use this expression in prayer, we are stating that we have Christ’s permission to ask. Our thoughts and requests come “under His signature.” We don’t talk to God based on our worthiness but upon Christ’s. As you pray today, think about the high honor of having permission to address your Creator.

Consider It

As you read John 1:1–51, consider these questions:

- 1) In what ways is it clear that “Word” refers to Jesus in this chapter?

- 2) Matthew and Luke have lengthy descriptions of Jesus’ birth. How does John 1:14 describe Jesus’ arrival?

- 3) How many names or qualities of Jesus can you find in this chapter?

- 4) In what ways other than already mentioned does John 1 parallel Genesis 1?

- 5) How important do you think it is to answer the question, “Is Jesus God”?

- 6) What is your answer, and what difference has that answer made in your life?

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Lesson
2

The Life of the Party

Jesus knew when to be restrained and when to be radical. He transformed a wedding party and demolished a shopping mall. In this lesson, we'll see the extremes of the "Jesus effect." His visits always made a difference—one way or another.

John 2:1–25

The Wedding at Cana

2 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

¹³The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their

tables. ¹⁶And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²²When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Key Verse

When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22).

Jesus Knows What Is in Man

²³Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Go Deeper

Neither the Jewish leaders nor Jesus' disciples understood His reference to "this temple" (John 2:19) as a prophecy about His death and Resurrection. Eventually the disciples saw the connection. And they even applied it in their own lives. They realized that if we receive Jesus, then we become a "space" we could call a temple. They saw that God had filled places in the past, but He wasn't confined to tabernacles or temples, nor did He live there.

In Acts 17:24, Paul takes it as a starting point that "the God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of

heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man." Twice in 1 Corinthians (3:16 and 6:19) Paul reminds his readers that they are "God's temple." And Peter, who witnessed the events in the temple, wrote, "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5). What kind of shape are you in as God's temple?

Hearth from outside, the noises of shoppers and partygoers sound similar. Both settings usually include a musical background, loud human interaction and all the little noises people make when they are eating, bartering, drinking and doing business—the business of celebrating or the business of commerce. These were settings Jesus visited. These were settings Jesus altered by His presence.

Jesus performed His first miracle (sign) in Cana of Galilee at a wedding. In those days, weddings were community events. The whole town showed up. The rules of hospitality made the event a costly one for the families of the bride and groom. Weddings lasted days! And running out of food or drink was considered a public humiliation.

The fact that Jesus was invited to the wedding though He was not from Cana has led scholars to believe there may have been a family connection with the couple. Mary's intervention also indicates a special interest. If part of the family was disgraced, the shame might spill over to other relatives.

Mary and Jesus' brief conversation offers us a glimpse into the relationship between the Lord and His mother. She didn't tell Him what to do, but it certainly seems clear that she asked Him to do something. He reminded her in a respectful way that He was not operating on His own timetable. His actions would be in rhythm with His Heavenly Father's timing.

Mary accepted Jesus' answer and retreated. But she told the servants to "do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). In response to her faith, Jesus transformed the stone jars full of water into the finest wine. He instantly changed what would have been an embarrassing memory into a miraculously memorable occasion!

Days later, when He arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus found the Court of the Gentiles taken over by a market. The space for silence and worship had been filled with the sounds of bleating, lowing, cooing, shouting and haggling. The Jewish temple leaders rationalized the market by claiming it was a service to pilgrims. They were not allowed to use Roman money in the offering plates, so the moneychangers made a handsome profit from providing "temple shekels." And why endure the inconvenience and difficulty of bringing a sacrificial dove or lamb to the temple when one could be bought within footsteps of the altar? For all its stench and noise, the market was a model of efficiency.

But Jesus wasn't convinced by the entrepreneurship of the merchants or the convenience of their wares. Instead He saw an affront to God and an offense to humans. God was being robbed of honor, and Gentiles were being robbed of a place to worship. Jesus took decisive action. He cleared out His Father's house.

The moneychangers and merchants fled, but the religious leaders who were also profiting from the vendors' presence demanded to know by what authority Jesus was acting: "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" (2:18). The Jewish leaders were proud of the temple (v. 20), but they were not treating it as God's house of prayer. Nor did they recognize God's presence as He walked in flesh among them.

In both situations Jesus restored order. He allowed the wedding party to continue but broke up the shopping party. The first

“ Jesus will make the joyous times unexpectedly better. But He may also intervene with what feels like violence in those areas of life where we allow the clutter of living to drown out God’s whispers.”

was pleasing to God; the second (transforming part of the temple into a livestock and money exchange) was deeply offensive to God. In each case, Jesus took appropriate action. He livened up the party and cleaned up the temple. He restored both places to their rightful purpose.

When we receive Jesus into our lives, He is actually present. He sees, hears and responds. We can expect the same variety of actions in our lives that we witness in this chapter. Jesus will make the joyous times unexpectedly better. But He may also intervene with what feels like violence in those areas of life where we allow the clutter of living to drown out God’s whispers. Whatever the place or occasion in our lives, we don’t want to miss the benefits of Jesus’ presence.

Express It

Before you pray, think about those things that may have become “a cluttered marketplace” in your life. Do your desires and the constant messages of advertisers crowd your moments with God? Set aside some time, and ask Jesus to cleanse your inner place of worship from those things (good and bad) that interfere with your capacity to hear Him and speak to Him.

Consider It

As you read John 2:1–25, consider these questions:

- 1) **What hints of a healthy relationship do you see in Jesus and Mary's exchange?**

- 2) **How well did the servants carry out Mary's request for them to "do whatever he tells you"?**

- 3) **What would cause Jesus to make "the best wine" rather than "more of the same" for the wedding party?**

- 4) **What might Jesus have meant by "My hour has not yet come" (2:4)?**

- 5) **What did locating the market in the temple's Court of the Gentiles say about the Jewish leaders' attitude toward outsiders?**

- 6) **How do Jesus' statements in this chapter illustrate His awareness of the cross?**

- 7) **Why would Jesus' understanding of people (2:24–25) cause Him to "not entrust himself to them"?**
